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# HOME-LIFE

IN

## RELATION TO DAY SCHOOLS.

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# HOME LIFE

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The rapid increase of day schools has made a somewhat sudden change in the conditions of girls' education, and time will be required to adapt ideas and customs to this change. Formerly, the girls of the upper middle class never or very rarely attended a day-school, they were usually taught by daily or resident governesses for some years, and then sent as boarders for one or two years to an expensive school—the whole education being "finished" at 16 or 17, or at most 18—then they "came out" and received little or no more regular education. Now, girls are often sent early to a day-school, the governess is dispensed with, and the education is continued much later.

It is generally acknowledged that there many advantages connected with this plan—the teaching is far better, and less dull than that given by a solitary governess, and girls can remain at home under a mother's care; besides education is less expensive than in a small boarding school.

It is, however, a universal law that nothing can be gained without some corresponding drawback, and at present the relations between school and home-life are not always such as could be desired; things have not yet adapted themselves to these changed circumstances.

1. Parents do not always recognize that they have, by adopting the day-school system, undertaken certain duties, which were done by *others*, when the higher terms were paid. Proprietary schools may be compared to co-operative stores—money is saved, but at the expense of trouble, and people who do not like to make their own bills, and fetch their own goods, go to shops—so, parents must consider that if

they obtain a cheaper education, if they have their children at home during three-fourths of the time, they must see this time is rightly spent. I will take up one subject to illustrate my meaning.

Formerly, the governess or the school mistress arranged the hours for study, recreation, sleep, &c., and saw that these were observed; now such duties devolve upon parents. I think it cannot be denied that head-mistresses have a just cause of complaint against some parents for failure in their duty in these respects, and that teachers get blame which ought justly to fall on mothers.

Is it not a common complaint that girls are overworked? Assuming for the sake of argument that this is true, I ask whose fault is it? Certainly the hours of High-schools cannot be said to be over long. The excessive work then must be out of school hours; of course if there is no regulation of evening work, but each professor or teacher sets that which is right in his own eyes, children may easily be overworked. In this case I fully admit the blame should fall in part on school or college. But I believe there are few, if any schools, in which great trouble is not taken to regulate the home-preparation. In most, a table of evening work is carefully prepared, and the amount of time required for preparation set down against each lesson; the table is sent home to parents, they are required to enter the time at which the preparation shall take place, and to sign the card. This is reviewed by the headmistress, and signed by her if she approves. At the head of this card is a printed request that the mistress may be at once informed if the amount of time spent in preparation differs much from that named on the

card. What is the result of this trouble? That children are often allowed to do their lessons *when they like*, and to sit up at night, and no word is said until there comes a notice that Dr. A. has *forbidden* the child to work at all. This is, perhaps, followed by an article against teachers generally, a declaration that education is injurious to girls, that woman is not a thinking animal, &c. It is quite *possible* that the work may have been too much, but in that case the parent who had undertaken duties, and neglected them, was *alone* to blame.

I know one schoolmistress who, because parents did not do their part, has been compelled to make each child bring a paper daily, signed by herself, "I began my lessons at — o'clock, and finished at — o'clock." Yet this mistress is accused of overworking her pupils, though she is more careful of their health than their own mothers; not, perhaps, because she is more anxious to do her duty, but because she is systematic, which many mothers are not; because she understands physiology, which most mothers do not; because she knows that working the brain too long, at wrong times, and under wrong conditions, cannot possibly conduce to mental improvement (nor even to success in examinations), which mothers, who allow children to work at night, do not.

But some will say, why do children sit up? They must have too much to do, or they would not wish it. There are many reasons for this besides the one generally supposed. There are, in fact, two classes of reasons, those due to the child herself, and those due to circumstances. Of the first class is vanity. I well remember a child being warned against studying too much, because a certain wrangler had injured his memory. Her only thought was, how well it would sound, how clever she would be thought, if she made herself ill by over study! 2. There is often a strange desire for pity, and a child supposed to have too many lessons gets noticed. How many sham martyrs there are in the world; they are never happy, but when they are miserable victims. 3. It is fine to sit up, grown up people do! 4. Children, if allowed, will often from laziness dawdle for hours over work, which would be done much better, if

they roused their attention, and worked briskly.

There is, however, another class of reasons, which we may call circumstantial—children have to work under difficulties. They are often obliged to prepare lessons in a room where there is talking and frequent interruption, even piano-playing. This is due, in part, to the fact that day-school education being much cheaper, some avail themselves of day-schools, whose means are very limited, and who have not more than one or two sitting-rooms; the chief reason is, however, that mothers are not aware of the *necessity for quiet*, if good intellectual work is to be done. We often hear it argued, that it is good to be able to work in a noise; that we ought to acquire the habit of abstracting our attention from our surroundings, otherwise, on emergencies, we shall often be incapable of thinking. I am sure, that amongst removable causes are, 1. Ignorance of the necessity for quiet. 2. Dislike of trouble. 3. Unwise economy.

1. Ignorance of its necessity.—Would any one expect the work of an observatory, an actuary's office, or a lawyer's, to be done in the midst of irrelevant talk, music, &c.? We have all heard of Mr. Babbage's quarrel with organ-grinders. Yet mathematicians have cultivated the power of abstraction to a very high degree. Have we a right to expect children to do what great thinkers cannot? It may be answered, we do not expect children to do the work of great thinkers. I reply that if education is doing for them what it ought, it is training them to a vigorous use of their thinking powers, and the effort required of them is one proportioned to their strength. One of two results follows; either the child does not make a great effort, and does not succeed in fixing her attention on the work in hand, or she makes efforts, more or less successful. In the first case, exercises are written full of careless mistakes, things read are half understood, notes of lectures turn out nonsense, nothing is digested, nothing can be done which requires sustained thought; the instruction given in the school is rendered worthless, because it is not properly digested at home, and habits are formed of superficial and inaccurate work; children get into the way of being



contented to do things badly, mechanically, instead of thinking them out. But in the second case, though the intellectual work done may be better, the effect on children's character is, I think, sometimes worse. Jane begins a sum, an exercise, a proof—"Mama, how do you like this crewel pattern?" says Mary (whose education is finished). If Jane has self-command enough not to look up, she yet has lost the thread of the reasoning, and must begin again—probably, however, she jumps up to look. The lesson has to be done a second, often a third time. There is nothing so fretting as unsuccessful effort, the brain becomes irritable, bed-time comes, and the work is not done. She is allowed, perhaps, to sit up and use her brain at a time when it is jaded and worn, and ought to have rest and sleep. So the evil is aggravated, and the temper suffers. Then it is *supposed* that too much has been set.

What then is required is, (1) a proper disposition of the day, and that that disposition should, under ordinary circumstances, be adhered to. (2) Parents must understand that work in the midst of interruptions, or late at night, or in early morning, is injurious, and not let their children do as they like. (3) They must provide a quiet room for study. We are told often this cannot be—then I would say let home-education be given up.

But is it really true that a quiet room could not be given? People have to undergo all sorts of expense and inconvenience when mischief has been done, but they will not endure a little to avert it. Let us see if there are not ways which might be had recourse to. Are there not many middle-class houses in which there are only two sitting-rooms—one for meals, the other a show room to be used only for visitors? What if a little less we sacrificed to the goddess of fashion. *Punch* had a picture of a fond mother telling her child how much she loved her, better than this or that; the child gravely asked—"And better than blue china?" It is a desperate sacrifice that I would ask, to make this a common room for all those who are not students, to keep the other room always silent, when lessons are going on. If this cannot be, or if there is one sitting-room, girls might work in their

bedroom. Does not a real wastefulness lie at the root of many economies? I have known people pay 10s. 6d. a lesson, and yet grudge 5s. for a book. The trouble and expense of a fire is saved at the expense of a child's progress or health. But, it is answered, it is not healthy to make a bedroom a study. Under proper regulations no harm need result. The room should be thoroughly aired before it is closed for the night, and this could easily be done, as no child should be allowed to study up to bedtime. It is said perhaps a bedroom would be untidy, and disorderly habits would be formed. Such need not be the case, if the child were provided with a combination piece of furniture, (writing table and bookcase in one,) such as one finds in all foreign bedrooms, or a Winchester bookcase. If these were more in demand, they would be made, like other school furniture, very cheaply; but should the expense still be too great, then a Swedish desk with a few shelves over would be all that is necessary. A gas fire would save all the trouble of lighting coal, and would not make the bedroom dusty. But this is only suggested in case a quiet study should not be otherwise procurable.

Sometimes, however, when this is provided, it is rendered quite useless. "Mary, I think you have not been quiet when you wrote this exercise. Were you in the dining-room?" "No, in the study; but my brothers are there, and they make such a riot. John was fighting with William," or "Yes, but Jane would talk." Sometimes quietness is due to a novel. Now, it is not enough to provide a room: in all schools there is some one to see that the children are quiet, and to see that they do their work themselves. Superintendence is not in a family always necessary, but it should be given where it is. Sometimes we have had occasion to write to a parent about careless work, and have found that although a room was provided, the child was allowed to sit in the drawing-room. I have been told, "She says it does not hinder her." Of course it is more amusing to the child to hear conversation, and I suppose we can all remember the time when great resolution was required on our part to leave a bright room and pleasant society, to learn a French or Latin grammar.

But perhaps a child really has too

much work; then the mistress ought to be told, and she will of course diminish it, but she is not told. Some will ask, Why? One reason is that parents are considerate for teachers, and do not like to give the head-mistress trouble. I am often told, "you have so much to attend to," or "of course you cannot arrange for each child," "of course she must take her chance." Now, I am sure I speak the mind of all head-mistresses when I say we *wish* not to be spared such trouble.. We wish parents would come to us *whenever* they find anything requires alteration. I never consider it a trouble. We *can* alter things for each individual child—in fact we do—very few take the general table without some special modification to meet the individual case. When this ceases to be possible, the school ceases to be good. By a proper organisation a general is able to command a large army, and if the responsibility of each member of the staff is properly apportioned, no child is neglected, and there is no excessive burden on the Head. We earnestly beg that parents will not spare us trouble by keeping from us the beginning of mischief, which can easily be stopped; we shall, in the end, be troubled tenfold, when evils have grown to a height that one cannot, or only with difficulty, cure.

I scarcely like to give some of the reasons why parents do not tell us if a child is overworked. I have been told on asking, "The child is afraid of losing her place, or going into a lower class," *i.e.*, I want my child to do more than she ought, in order to excel others, who are really her superiors. Is this wrong ambition? Or, I want her to pass some examination. No parent or teacher ought to permit a child to enter for any examination, if her powers are to be thereby strained. If she cannot do it without encroaching on the hours of sleep and recreation, those are guilty who allow children to enter. Some parents insist on children's learning too many subjects. Here, however, I should lay the blame on the mistress, for she should steadily resist, and refuse to let a child take too many subjects. She must do her best for each, and be content to lose pupils rather than consent.

Must I add a fourth reason? That some parents seem afraid of their children. I know one mistress who was sur-

prised by hearing that a certain pupil was sitting up late, and that her father intended to write to the papers. One happily was present who was acquainted with the regulations of that college, and inquired of her father whether he had signed the card of evening work. "Oh, yes." "But if it is not true, why did you?" "My daughter asked me." "Have you told the head-mistress?" "No, my daughter does not like me to do so." He did not write to the papers, but a report is still circulated to the disadvantage of that college. I might easily multiply examples. One other point I must mention. The injudicious "help" given, and I grieve to say the low tone which is permitted sometimes, as regards the use of "cribs." I have heard parents say, "Oh, John is obliged to use a crib, the other boys do, and he could not keep up with his companions."

I have myself been told by a mother—"Jane's father has long done her sums for her, and she has copied them—she could not do them without." And so the governess has gone on in happy ignorance that the child knew nothing of what she was about, and the child has been educated to shirk the labour of thought, and to neglect her duty, I think I express the opinion of almost all teachers when I say that "help" of any kind is really a hindrance, and that children ought to be made to do work unaided—those at home, in the case of young children, merely seeing that they do prepare, and perhaps hearing the lessons.

Will parents be angry with me? I think not. Let them know that I have only given utterance to what teachers say behind their backs. Mrs. W. Grey told me she once attended a meeting of teachers, at which she was the only "lay" person. She was so troubled at hearing the enormities committed by those who were not teachers, that she never ventured there again. There is nothing like plain speaking for making people understand and respect one another, there is nothing like back-biting for keeping up misunderstandings and oppositions. Let parents come to us, and tell us plainly any complaints they have to make, instead of *talking* over grievances with strangers, who cannot amend them, or children who are injured by hearing their teachers condemned. There can be no *real*

opposition between parents and teachers if both wish the children's good. I believe all head-mistresses will agree with me in saying that every year finds the co-operation of parents more hearty, as we become ourselves more experienced in the management of our schools, and they learn to understand that we would never willingly gain

reputation for our school at the risk of children's health, nor desire numbers and worldly prosperity without regarding above all the right development of the children physically, intellectually, and morally. If children are to be educated as they ought, parents and teachers must work heartily together for their good.













